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INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE

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SENSITIVE

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DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA

ALSO FOR IO A/S BRIMMER

P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY

USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER

NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT

DRL/NESA FOR WHITMAN

OVP FOR HMUSTAFA

STATE PASS USAID FOR LAUDATO/NANDY/SCOTT

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: MINISTER OF INTERIOR CONFIDENT ON ELECTORAL LOGISTICS, SECURITY

REF: A. A. BEIRUT 263

[B.](#) B. BEIRUT 247

SUMMARY

[¶](#)1. (SBU) In a May 19 meeting hosted by UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL) Michael Williams, Minister of Interior Ziyad Baroud, the lead GOL official responsible for elections, provided a detailed update to the donor community on the preparations for the June 7 parliamentary elections. While taking the opportunity to thank donors for the technical assistance provided, a confident Baroud stressed that preparations are completed and that the elections will be held on time. Baroud assured the group that he is playing an effective and non-partisan role in ensuring that the June 7 parliamentary elections proceed smoothly. Baroud expressed concern about the absence of a complete Constitutional Council, which would rule on electoral disputes, a concern also raised by several donors. End Summary.

SCEC: LEBANON'S ELECTION SUCCESS STORY

[¶](#)2. (SBU) In a May 19 meeting attended by the DCM, Acting USAID Chief and Poloff, Minister of Interior Ziyad Baroud reassured the international donor community that the June 7 parliamentary elections will be held as scheduled with no major obstacles. Attending his second UN-hosted meeting since February, Baroud highlighted the formation of the Supervisory Commission for the Election Campaign (SCEC) as a success story for Lebanon, while noting that there are several areas that need improvement. Considered by election experts as one of the most important reforms introduced in the new electoral law, the SCEC has commenced its tasks overseeing compliance with the electoral law's various regulatory measures on campaign finance, spending, advertising, and media coverage. The commission is a 10-member body comprised of former judges, local Bar Association presidents, and media and election experts, with a mandate extending six months after election day. The 10 members, led by President Ghassan Abu Alwan, a former judge on the court of cassation, were approved by the Cabinet last December.

¶3. (SBU) While touring the offices of the SCEC after the meeting, the group was able to observe the work of the media monitoring team, situated in a large room with approximately 20 cubicles. The media monitoring team, comprised of approximately 50 members, daily monitors 18 major TV stations, radio, websites, newspapers, and magazine advertisements related to the elections. The monitors document the various election violations that occur and add it to an archive. The SCEC released its first report of election violations on May 7. The commission, according to Baroud, published in its first report only 10 percent of the amount of information that currently exists in the archive, and plans to release the remainder of the information, focusing primarily on media coverage and campaign finance monitoring, in its second and final report (due immediately after June 7).

POLLING STATIONS ARE READY

¶4. (SBU) According to Baroud, the polling stations are fully set up around the country and are prepared for June 7. The training of officials, observers, and journalists has begun. Approximately 10,500 polling station officers will be manning the stations in all 26 districts, and another 1,000 officers will be on reserve as standby. Since polling officials will not be able to vote on the day of the elections, Baroud explained that they will have the opportunity to cast their ballots early on June 4. One central polling station located in each district will open from 7 AM to 7 PM to receive these

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individuals, and candidate representatives will be allowed to be present at the stations on that day. The events on June 4 will mimic the voting process on June 7; however, according to Baroud, the envelopes containing the votes from June 4 will not be opened that day, but will be counted and then transported to the central counting stations in each district. Baroud stressed that in order not to jeopardize the one-day voting process, all envelopes will be opened on June 7 after all polling stations have closed.

¶5. (SBU) In addition, Baroud displayed to the group a sample ballot box that will be used for the elections. The conventional box, about 12" X 20" and weighing approximately 7 lbs, is formed from transparent white plastic and is provided with a hinged lid in which there is a slot for allowing ballot papers to be inserted. These boxes, along with various election-related posters will be distributed to all polling stations the week of the elections. He noted one poster that lists seven points in Arabic, English, and French instructing voters how to vote.

NATIONAL ID CARDS/ VOTERS LIST

¶6. (SBU) The new electoral law allows voters to use either their national ID cards or their passports as acceptable forms of identification on election day, instead of the Voter ID card used in previous elections. Baroud said that currently 245,000 national ID cards have been issued. In a previous meeting, Baroud had explained to the Ambassador that 600,000 national ID cards need to be printed before election day. (Note: As of February 13, only 100,000 national ID cards were printed. With the rate of less than 50,000 ID cards printed each month, it is highly unlikely that the Ministry will hit the 600,000 mark by June 7. End Note.)

¶7. (SBU) Baroud also explained that voters will be able to access the voters list on-line (www.elections.gov.lb) ahead of June 7 to verify that their name has been added to the list and to locate their polling station. He noted that voters can only vote in these elections if their name is on the list. This initiative, headed by the Ministry of Interior with technical assistance from IFES, marks the first

time in Lebanon where voters can access their information on-line. In a side conversation, IFES Country Chief Richard Chambers said that while the website is up and running, there are some logistical specifics that are still being worked on.

UPDATE ON OBSERVATION MISSIONS

¶8. (SBU) Baroud highlighted the importance of the Council of Ministers unanimously approving the decree to invite international observers, and said that he is pleased with the level of interest shown by the international community in observing the June 7 elections. An "Observers Unit" was set up at the Ministry of Interior, and heads of the unit have been appointed. Representatives from the three official long-term observation missions - the Carter Center, the European Union, and the National Democratic Institute - were present at the meeting. Baroud explained that he is confident that all international and local experts in charge of monitoring the elections will abide by the Code of Conduct issued on May 5 by the Interior Ministry and will treat all candidates equally. UNSCOL Williams added that the Arab League and the Turkish government, whose representatives were also present, also plan to send observation missions, but noted that formal decisions have yet to be finalized.

SECURITY PLAN FOR JUNE 7

¶9. (SBU) Baroud reiterated that a comprehensive security plan was adopted two weeks ago by the Central Security Council in preparations for the June 7 elections. The

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security plan, which will oversee the organization of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), the Internal Security Forces (ISF), and the judiciary during the election process, calls for the creation of a Central Operation Group (COG) for security at the Ministry of Interior. The COG will be linked to all operation groups in the 26 districts and will be headed by a lead manager. The COG also will be linked to the national election hot-line, which not only receives election-related complaints, but will also direct any violence-related issues to the COG. The four-digit hot-line number is active 24 hours a day and is manned by a 10-person team.

¶10. (SBU) Baroud said that the security plan also calls for the organization of the ISF and LAF on elections day to be based upon a risk assessment analysis of every region in the country. The assessments measure the degree of potential sectarian, political, or common election-related violence in each district. (Note: Although not publicly announced, the MOI has acknowledged to IFES privately that their security assessments are based on the risk assessment project administered by IFES and funded by the UK. End Note.) The assessment is updated each week, and according to the results, ISF and LAF officials are distributed across the 26 districts accordingly. The final update will occur on June 3.

CONCERN ABOUT NO FINAL CONSTITUTIONAL COUNCIL

¶11. (SBU) Baroud was very frank in expressing concern that the Cabinet (of which he is a member) has not reached an agreement on the appointment of the Constitutional Council, which is the sole authority that has the power to look into election-related complaints -- Ref. A and B. Baroud stressed that the appointment of five remaining Constitutional Council members must be completed ahead of June 7 in order to guarantee "a smooth transition to the next phase." He was critical of the view that resolving the impasse over Council membership can wait until after the election.

COMMENT

¶12. (SBU) Baroud, a veteran civil society activist who has been praised by the international community for his efforts towards electoral reform, was organized and confident in explaining the organizational scheme for the June 7 vote. Although the atmosphere in the room was positive and collegial, it was obvious that the issue of the remaining appointments on the Constitutional Council remains a concern among donors. End Comment.

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